

Oliver Jackson, *Untitled*, 1996.
Wood, pigment, metal, acrylic,
and pitch, 61 x 58 x 16 in.



San Diego

Oliver Jackson

Porter Troupe Gallery

Oliver Jackson epitomizes the grand scale possible in the spacious, sunlit Porter Troupe Gallery. His retrospective exhibition of 29 works from 1978 to the present features many paintings 96 inches square or larger. Jackson is known for visceral, bravura painting that employs bright color, impasto, coded symbols, and collage effects. His sculpture has received little critical attention despite prestigious commissions by the city of Oakland and other institutions. The seven untitled sculptures in this show are personal and idiosyncratic. They collectively demonstrate Jackson's obsession with emblems of life and death and with prototypes from the Dogon people of Mali as

well as Buddhist, European, and other cultures.

The most commanding of the untitled works is a 61-by-58-by-16-inch, L-shaped construction from 1996 that is carved, nailed, painted, and tarred. The central form is a man wearing a hat; his neck is broken, his feet and arms are bound. His mask-like metal face-plate has white death markings and a central hole—perhaps for spirits to pass through. The frame of nail heads and tar around the edges recalls building materials but also symbols and experiences associated with African and African-American experience. This grim facade is attached to a rough piece of wood that is crudely nailed at both ends, giving the impression of a neck detached twice. Below the "neck," the back of the main vertical beam is carved with a

black death mask with white eyes and a skeletal form. This upside-down figure seems to hang from a rack. The large perpendicular, phallic limb of the sculpture is painted blue, a color that symbolizes positive universals such as water, sky, and "being." Yet the blue is encircled by white and black. In this way, the artist encodes his potent themes in multiple references to grief, sexuality, and joy.

Jackson's sculptural craft is worth observing: two forged steel pole figures with large heads (1978), were presences in the gallery's entrance foyer. A 96-by-26.5-by-16-inch work of 1978 conjures the ghost of the artist, his body a forged steel collage of paint brushes, rags, and objects bound onto a white board with two red sashes. A later work (1986–92) is a minimal man on a

wood block; his carved long legs and longer torso and arms lead to a flat, upward-tilted head/house that is yellow on top.

Jackson's vision is fluent, mindful, and obsessive, and at the forefront of what may be a new international style, as exemplified in several other artists represented by Porter Troupe: Mel Edwards, Elizabeth Murray, and José Bedia. —Jan Garden Castro